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Introduction

As a requirement established by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH),

*All professional degree students must develop skills in basic public health concepts and demonstrate the application of these concepts through a practice experience that is relevant to the students’ areas of specialization.*

(CEPH, School of Public Health Accreditation Criteria, Amended June 2005).

In accordance with these requirements, all MPH students in Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University (GW-SPH) are required to satisfactorily complete a practice experience, known as a practicum, before graduation.

In the following pages, you will find a detailed description of the Practicum process and the role of a Site Preceptor. We hope this will facilitate your participation and ensure a solid partnership with the GW-SPH. We thank you for your interest in participating in our program.

Since practical knowledge and skills are essential to a successful career in public health, a planned, supervised, and evaluated practicum is an essential component of a public health professional degree program. The goal of the practicum is to provide an opportunity for students to synthesize, integrate, and apply practical skills, knowledge, and training learned through courses, to gain professional experience in a public health work environment, and to work on public health practice projects that are of particular interest to not only themselves but also the community at large.

The school’s location in the nation’s capital allows for a variety of unique experiences within a multitude of practicum sites. To help facilitate this experience, GW-SPH has created this guidebook¹ to give you an overall picture of the practicum experience.

What is an MPH Practicum?

The practicum is a partnership among GW-SPH Students, The George Washington University, and sponsoring agencies/organizations. In this partnership, GW-SPH is represented by Practicum Directors and sponsoring organizations are represented by Site Preceptors. Each party in this mutually beneficial relationship assumes certain responsibilities, performs specific functions, and

¹ Individual departments and academic programs may have additional materials.
accrues benefits. The practicum is guided by a set of goals and objectives, which are based on the needs and resources of all parties involved.

A practicum provides the opportunity to integrate and apply classroom learning in a public health setting, enabling students to observe and learn from you, professionals in the field. Students will contribute to a community’s resources and to the solution of public health problems, while developing practical skills and personal confidence as a public health professional.

**School-wide Practicum Standards**

Although certain elements of the practicum vary by department, the following are practicum standards for all MPH students:

- The practicum must be conducted in a public health or related setting;
- The practicum must be supervised by an experienced public health or related professional;
- The student must complete at least 120 hours of work on-site; and
- Students will receive credit or no credit based on a Site Preceptor’s evaluation of their performance through a final evaluation.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

During the practicum the student will work under the supervision of the Practicum Director, and the Site Preceptor, who agrees to directly supervise the student during the practicum experience. Decisions on the specific objectives, activities, and division within the organization are determined through discussions and agreements amongst the Site Preceptor, the student, and the Practicum Director. The roles and responsibilities of a Site Preceptor are outlined below.

**Site Preceptor**

1. Visit the Practicum Website [https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum) and Register. (See To Register: for instructions)
2. Review and approve the Student’s Practicum Plan
3. Negotiate payment/stipend with Student, if applicable
4. Engage student in work and provide constructive feedback and guidance to the student
5. Provide guidance for professional conduct
6. Complete the following on the Practicum Website:
   a. Midpoint evaluation form in conjunction with the student
   b. Final site preceptor evaluation of student and practicum
7. Address student’s reports of problems, including site safety issues and/or harassment

**An Overview of the Practicum Experience**
What kind of organizations can be an MPH practicum site?

In general, a practicum site has the following elements:

- Serves a public health, health services, or social impact mission or supports an agency or department with such a mission
- Addresses significant public health, health services or social problems
- Offers students the opportunity to learn from public health professionals in a supervised environment

The following provides a general overview of the processes involved in completing the practicum experience.

Prior to Student Placement:

Site Preceptors are required to complete and submit the Preceptor Application and Site Application online through the GW-SPH Practicum Website. As part of the Site Preceptor application, you will also be required to submit a one-page bio sketch or resume, which can be uploaded with the Preceptor application. The Departmental Practicum Director and the Associate Dean for Practice will review and approve these materials.

Note that in order to submit a Project Description (an example of the kind of work you wish to do with our students), you must first complete the Preceptor and Site Application process as outlined above. After verification/approval of these applications, a login will be e-mailed to you allowing you to submit a Project Description for students to review.

Interviewing and Selecting MPH Practicum Students

In most circumstances, you will meet our students via networking, referral from a fellow student, or a colleague, so an informal interview will already have taken place. Students who are unfamiliar with your work will have the chance to view your project description online, but they will not gain access to your contact information until they have met with their department’s Practicum Director to discuss the project. When the student and their advisor have agreed on a suitable match, the advisor will provide the student access to your contact information to set up an informational interview.

The Practicum Plan

A student will work with the Site Preceptor, and their Practicum Director to design, review, and approve the Practicum Plan. As part of the plan, the Site Preceptor and the student will identify
learning objectives, related to the student’s program-specific competencies, for the practicum experience. The student will submit the Plan online for review and approval by you and the departmental Practicum Director. All Site Preceptors need to approve the plan by logging on to Practicum Website.

Learning objectives are statements of what the student will achieve during the practicum or will be able to do once the student has completed the practicum. You will evaluate these objectives at the mid-point and the final evaluation of the practicum.

Learning objectives must:

- Be linked to the student’s program-specific practicum competencies (Program-specific competencies are listed here: https://publichealth.gwu.edu/practicum/progcorecomp.cfm
- Build the student’s professional skills
- Be prepared in conjunction with and approved by the Site Preceptor, Academic Advisor and Practicum Director.

Examples of appropriate learning objectives (LO) are as follows:

1. **Competency:** Assess environmental and occupational exposures
   LO: Use air-monitoring equipment correctly for taking meaningful workplace samples.

2. **Competency:** Apply knowledge of global health patterns and determinants in support of global health research.
   LO: Conduct a needs assessment in response to avian influenza in Uganda.

3. **Competency:** Assessing the methodology and quality of research results.
   LO: Synthesize and summarize health care policy news as it relates to children, low-income families, and Medicaid.

**Supervising the Practicum Experience**

In this stage of the practicum experience the student will work under your guidance to carry out the practicum project in accordance with the expectations set forth in the Practicum Plan. The practicum will entail a minimum of 60 hours of fieldwork per credit hour, 120 hours for most MPH programs. The practicum may be completed in as little as three weeks, one semester (14 weeks), or up to 2 semesters (28 weeks).

While the student is onsite, the student will be required to login to the Practicum Website and track contact hours. As the hours are completed, the system will track and subsequently prompt the student and Site Preceptor to fill out required, time-sensitive materials such as the Midpoint and Final Evaluations.
Evaluating the Practicum Experience

There are two types of evaluations that preceptors complete for the practicum:

- A mid-point evaluation that will be completed during the practicum
- A final evaluation that will be completed at the end of the practicum experience.

The midpoint evaluation will be completed with the student and any changes to the Practicum Plan must be submitted by the student to the Practicum Director and Academic Advisor.

The final evaluation of the practicum experience will be evaluated for credit or no credit by the Practicum Director based on the evaluation and recommendation of the Site Preceptor and the Practicum Director. The student will see and review the Site Preceptor’s final outcome evaluation, without the preceptor’s responses about the program or website.

Practicum Website

The Practicum Website provides you with one location for:

- Policies and requirements
- Required forms
- Program-specific materials
- Listing of practicum opportunities
- Tools and resources

All Forms must be filled out electronically and submitted through the Practicum Website. Practicum Training sessions will be available to provide you with an overview on how to use this site and address any questions you may have. Instructions for the primary site functions you will use are below.

Using the Practicum Website

The direct address of the site is: https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum

The site can also be accessed by visiting the GWSPH homepage (http://publichealth.gwu.edu/). If you have any questions, please contact the GWSPH Webmaster gwsphweb@gwu.edu

To Register:

1. Register as a “Preceptor” AND your “Site”

   Go to: https://publichealth.gwu.edu/practicum/practicumApp/applicationPre.cfm
2. Click “Preceptor” and fill out form.

3. Select the appropriate Department/Concentration (your student, if you have one already, can give you this information). * Please note if you are working with a student in the MPH@GW program, please select this as your Department/Concentration
   a. Or, select “No Specific Department” if you do not have a student already placed, and do not have a preference for the department/concentration the student would come from.

4. Select your “Site” if your Organization is already registered.
   a. If your Organization or “Site” is not registered, Click “Site” and fill out the form to register.

5. Click “Submit”.

6. Once you are verified, you will receive a username and password.
Add a Project:

1. Once you get your password, log into the site here:  
   https://publichealth.gwu.edu/practicum/

2. Click “Add a New Project”, and fill out the form (please use as much detail as possible).

3. Click “Submit” on the bottom of the form.

4. Please notify the student after you submit. The system is set up like a “matchmaker” website so the student will need to submit their plan against your project.

5. Once the student submits their plan, you and the Practicum Director will get an automatic notification to verify the plan. To verify, log in and click the “sign” button at the end of their plan.
Add a Signature to a Plan

1. Once a student has submitted their plan, they will need you to sign the plan in order for them to log hours.

2. To do this, click on your student’s plan

3. Under Practicum Agreement on the Plan, type your name into the signature line next to “Preceptor Signature”. Also type the date of signature.
Midpoint and Final Evaluations

1. Login
2. Click on Evaluations in the Left-hand Menu
3. In the list under “Display”, click on the student’s name
   a. For the Midpoint Evaluation, type in your name to approve the evaluation after you have discussed the evaluation with the student. The student will not be able to log hours until she or he has received your approval.
   b. For the Final Preceptor Evaluation, evaluate the student’s overall performance on a scale of 1-5 (5 being Excellent), and sign to confirm. The student’s grade will be based partially on your evaluation of her or his performance.
View of Final Preceptor Evaluation:

Abigail Wilkes
Preceptor Evaluation

Rating Scale:

1 = Unsatisfactory  2 = Poor  3 = Acceptable  4 = Good  5 = Excellent

--- Student ---

A. Please evaluate the student’s performance throughout the Practicum. Evaluate each item using the scale of 1-5 listed above.

- Professional
  1. Was reliable (attendance, punctuality, etc.)  1 2 3 4 5
  2. Demonstrated appropriate professional behavior  1 2 3 4 5
  3. Was motivated and demonstrated initiative, as needed  1 2 3 4 5
  4. Worked independently, as needed  1 2 3 4 5
  5. Completed projects in a timely manner  1 2 3 4 5
  6. Demonstrated the ability to solve problems effectively  1 2 3 4 5

  Comments:

- Interpersonal
  7. Expressed ideas effectively in oral communications  1 2 3 4 5
  8. Expressed ideas effectively in writing  1 2 3 4 5
  9. Worked well with others  1 2 3 4 5
  10. Solicited and/or accepted feedback and utilized suggestions  1 2 3 4 5

  Comments:

- Knowledge and Skills
  11. Acquired the level of knowledge necessary to perform the project  1 2 3 4 5
  12. Used available resources to complete the practicum  1 2 3 4 5
  13. Demonstrated the ability to transfer public health knowledge and skills to address practical issues  1 2 3 4 5

  Comments:

--- Did the student meet the learning objectives stipulated in the Student Practicum Plan (found below)? ---

Yes [ ]

Last updated: May 2015
Practicum Training

You are highly encouraged to participate in the Preceptor Practicum Training prior to hosting students onsite. This training will be offered throughout each semester.

The training takes one hour and provides information on your role and responsibilities as well as use of the Practicum Website.

Financial Compensation

Participation in the practicum is not predicated on the availability of remuneration but on the quality and value of the educational experience. Financial compensation for the practicum, if available, is a matter to be negotiated between you and the student prior to the commencement of the practicum experience.

The possibility of payment is not a consideration in the approval of the practicum. In most cases, because of the limited duration and nature of practicum placements, they are unpaid. However, preceptors are advised that the student must pay tuition to the University for a two-credit hour course (approximately $2,000) in order to receive credit for the practicum.
## Contacts

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Thank you for your commitment to shaping our future public health workforce. We greatly appreciate your time and support!